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Next 2 Page(s) In Document Denied

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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Meeting Engagement of a Tank Army During a Front Offensive Operation

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The Meeting Engagement of a Tank Army During a Front Offensive Operation

by

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The primary factor contributing to the occurrence of meeting engagements and battles during modern operations is the possession by the belligerents of nuclear weapons, which can effect a swift change in the balance of forces and means, and create conditions that enable the ground forces to accomplish their tasks by taking the offensive.

By employing nuclear weapons, large troop groupings can be destroyed and extensive gaps formed in their disposition in a minimal amount of time. The attacker will first move his tank groupings into these gaps so as to shift his efforts into the depth as quickly as possible. The defender in turn will endeavor to prevent the troops of the attacker from breaking through on these axes by conducting decisive counterattacks and counterthrusts with his surviving forces and fresh reserves. The experience of the last war and strategic and operational exercises conducted during the last six to seven years -- for example, SHTURM (STORM), VESNA (SPRING), and DNEPR -- shows that the belligerents will take these actions.

Meeting engagements may occur under differing circumstances and at any stage of an operation regardless of whether it was initiated with the unrestricted employment of nuclear weapons, or with the use of only conventional or of tactical nuclear means.

When nuclear weapons are employed at the beginning of a front operation, the tank army may conduct a meeting engagement in the border zone with the task of routing the surviving enemy groupings of the troops making up his first and second operational echelons.

When the enemy has been effectively damaged during the initial nuclear strike and he does not take the offensive, a meeting engagement may take place in the border zone involving a battle with the immediate operational reserves (army reserves and army groups) for the forward defensive line. However, when this

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occurs the army will have to negotiate obstacles of various types as well as the opposition of surviving enemy troops on this line prior to the beginning of the meeting engagement.

Therefore, in defeating the enemy in a border engagement that involves negotiating a nuclear minefield and overcoming surviving forces on the forward defensive line, it is necessary to have tank troops in the first echelon; to provide for the commitment to the engagement of the large units of the second echelon (reserve) of the army as early as the beginning of the operation, especially when the possibility is anticipated that individual first-echelon large units will be put out of action; to increase fighter aviation cover against air strikes; to meticulously plan the negotiation of the nuclear minefield and the rout of the enemy with the participation of front nuclear means, aviation, airborne landing forces, tank troops and other means furnished by adjacent armies.

The conditions under which military actions are prepared for and conducted during this period are characterized by uncertainty, i.e., by the lack of comprehensive data on the enemy and his troops, and by the presence of vast zones of radioactive contamination, destruction, and fires. As a result of the exchange of initial nuclear strikes, during the very first hours of the war not only individual large units but also entire levels of the operational disposition of the troops of the army and even of the front may be put out of action. If a number of large units of the tank army and adjacent formations, particularly those operating on the flanks, are destroyed and individual levels of groupings of the rocket troops, aviation, and air defense troops are put out of action, it will be necessary to conduct measures to restore the combat effectiveness of the army troops (the formation of composite units within short time limits, the replacement of units or large units that have lost their combat effectiveness with second-echelon units, having the most combat-effective large units maneuver to the main axis, etc.).

Besides the destruction of ground forces large units, control posts may also be put out of action. This would make it much more difficult to obtain information on the situation, to organize the destruction of the enemy, and to maintain and implement cooperation both within the army and with the rocket troops, aviation and air defense troops of the front, as well as

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with adjacent formations.

An engagement in the border zone is particularly dangerous for an army if it has suffered considerable losses from enemy strikes, and if the enemy, having retained a portion of his forces, is able to form sufficiently strong tank and missile/nuclear groupings on the axis where the army is operating. Drawing a tank army into the engagement may lead to a slowing down of the speed of the offensive operation, a delay in shifting efforts to the depth, and the loss of the initiative of actions.

In order to prevent this, it is essential that the tank army provide for the enemy's defeat under these conditions in advance and make careful plans to do so still in peacetime. Since the destruction of the enemy with nuclear weapons in the border zone is planned in the front, the front then must in advance work out and make calculations (with the help of an electronic computer) for the possible variants in which combat actions may occur during a border meeting engagement, determine which forces and means of the front and adjacent formations will participate in the destruction of the remaining enemy groupings, make a detailed study of the possible areas where this engagement may be conducted and determine which are the most hazardous in terms of radioactivity and fires, and outline and carefully plan measures for negotiating contaminated areas and nuclear minefields, and measures for maintaining and restoring combat effectiveness, and for the cooperation of the army troops with the other front groupings.

The most important characteristic of a border meeting engagement conducted by an army as part of an operation which was initiated employing only conventional means of destruction is the increased role of the fire destruction of the enemy employing artillery, aviation, antitank guided missiles, and other conventional combat means. Under these conditions artillery will remain one of the primary destructive means since the enemy battle formations are saturated with tanks, self-propelled artillery, armored vehicles and antitank guided missiles.

The practice of exercises, including the DNEPR exercise, has demonstrated that the bulk of the artillery must be concentrated on the axis of the main attack, in so doing, creating the most

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50X1-HUM

favorable conditions for the massing of its fire on decisive axes. When a meeting engagement is anticipated, it is desirable first of all to form an army artillery group. It should contain at least two long-range artillery regiments and it should be assigned to combat nuclear attack means, to neutralize control posts and communications centers, and to reinforce the fire of the divisions in the first echelon of the army attack grouping.

Assuming that during the meeting engagement the enemy will concentrate his main efforts in the first echelon, it is desirable to also have regimental artillery groups composed of two or three battalions, particularly in those divisions operating on the axis of the main attack. Because of the shortage of artillery, battalion groups may be organized only in those first-echelon divisions operating on the axis of the main attack. During the non-nuclear period, the formation of the necessary artillery grouping on the axis where the tank army is operating is ensured by having the tank army reinforced by front means, since, obviously, the front should contain a number of artillery large units. The timely commitment to the engagement of large units of the second echelon (reserve) is very important for the swift transfer of efforts into the depth.

In this manner, a border meeting engagement will be typified by great skill in forming the necessary grouping of artillery and other combat means on the axis where the front attack groupings are operating, by the readiness of the tank army staff to organize and carry out the destruction of the enemy employing conventional means, by the skilful concentration of the forces and means in narrow sectors of the front, enlisting the aid of one's own superior forces to rout the enemy, and by the timely buildup of efforts to develop success.

An analysis of the conditions under which a tank army meeting engagement is prepared and carried out in a front offensive operation shows that the most difficult ones may occur in the operational depth, when the tank army is separated from the other front forces during the decisive nuclear period.

As is known, in this situation the enemy will attempt to destroy the tank army troops by having the rocket forces and aviation deliver preemptive strikes employing nuclear weapons; and to establish conditions for the commitment to battle of his

50X1-HUM

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new approaching reserve groupings by dropping airborne landing forces and by having his troops offer stubborn resistance. The enemy intends to have these groupings attack directly from the march immediately after the nuclear strikes by utilizing the bulk of his tank forces in the first echelon.

The separation of the tank army troops from the remaining front forces can make the preparation for and conduct of the meeting engagement very difficult. When there is a gap of 150 to 200 kilometers, such as may occur during the fifth or sixth day of the operation, the action of the front fighter-bomber aviation and the R-300 missile is impeded, especially the action directed against enemy reserves moving forward from the depth. For this reason the army commander and staff should provide in advance for the conduct of the necessary measures which ensure that the bulk of the nuclear warheads allocated to the operation for carrying out tasks during action in the enemy's depth will be effectively employed. The planning of a specific resource of bomber aviation, and occasionally of long-range aviation as well, is the task of the front staff. The moving forward of individual units (large units) of the front rocket troops behind the army should not be ruled out, if the situation permits.

The strength, position, and status of the army when it is operating in the enemy depth while separated from its troops will not always meet the requirements for conducting a meeting engagement. The combat strength of the army may be limited (to two or three divisions), and the second echelons and the reserves, including the large units, will be missing. At this time some large units may be engaged in combat actions with retreating groupings, others may be maneuvering to bypass zones of contamination and destruction and still others will be restoring order after enemy attacks. The possibility that several of them will have sustained considerable losses of personnel and armament and will have limited reserves of materiel cannot be ruled out. At the moment the meeting engagement is joined the front may not have any reserve large units available for quick reinforcement of the tank army.

At this stage it will become quite difficult to maintain reliable cooperation with the rocket troops, aviation, airborne landing forces, and other front groupings. This is quite understandable, since the enemy will take all possible measures

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to disrupt the operation of the technical communications means (right up to the detonation of special nuclear air bursts). Calculations show that the burst of a medium-yield nuclear warhead at an altitude of 60 kilometers can completely disrupt shortwave radio communications within a radius of 300 to 500 kilometers for a period of six to eight hours. If the loss of communications necessary for cooperation at the front-army level and for troop control is to be avoided, it is obvious that radio-relay and retransmission must be more widely employed in shortwave communications, and maximum use must be made of mobile communications means, including radio communications means mounted in helicopters and aircraft.

A tank army meeting engagement in the course of an operation may occur under conditions when the tank army troops do not have enough forces and means to completely rout the powerful enemy reserve groupings. It is therefore possible that the initial task confronting the army may be to inflict destruction upon the enemy meeting grouping in cooperation with bomber (long range) aviation and airborne troops dropped according to the plan of the front or the Supreme High Command. The total defeat of the enemy during the meeting engagement will be accomplished either with the aid of adjacent armies approaching the area of combat actions, or in cooperation with large units of the front second echelon, if it is operating on the given axis at that time.

When a tank army is separated from the main front forces, what are the objectives, nature, and special features of its preparation for and conduct of a meeting engagement?

First of all it must be observed that under these conditions the conduct of a meeting engagement is not an end in itself. It will be subordinated to the most rapid fulfilment of the main task of the front. Therefore, in spite of the constrained nature of the meeting engagement, the main objective of the army actions will be to inflict decisive destruction on the enemy grouping by means of a meeting attack to ensure the swift development of an offensive into the depth toward the areas which are vitally important to the enemy.

The success of a meeting engagement will be determined primarily by preemption in the delivery of powerful, sudden nuclear strikes and strikes employing other means. Preemptive

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strikes make it possible to seize and retain the initiative and achieve victory over a more powerful enemy even when the number of forces and means, including nuclear weapons, is inferior.

If a tank army is to deliver a preemptive nuclear strike, the capabilities of its rocket troops, above all, are a most important objective precondition. It is estimated that when the belligerents are moving toward each other at a total speed of 30 to 40 kilometers per hour, a missile brigade (with R-300 systems) will have approximately one hour within which to deliver a preemptive strike against a Sergeant guided missile within favorable range (150 to 200 kilometers) and will have two to three hours for a strike against all other tactical means. The missile battalions of large units are able to deliver such a strike against the Honest John free-flight rocket and nuclear artillery with a lead time of 0.5 to one hour. We have approximately the same capabilities against the enemy Lance missile systems. Consequently, even within this period of time a tank army is capable, with its missile brigade and the separate missile battalions of its large units, of carrying out one or two missile launches and of hitting up to two divisions and a number of important targets in the advancing enemy grouping. However, to do this, timely measures must be conducted to maintain them in a state of combat effectiveness and combat readiness, they must be provided with missiles and reconnaissance data, and the correct troop control methods must be selected.

Because of the increased fire power of the belligerents and the growth in tank maneuverability and striking power, a meeting engagement will be typified by rapid development and simultaneous expansion in scope. If in the last war tank army meeting engagements (such as those of the 5th Guards Tank Army at Prokhorovka) lasted 24 to 48 hours or more, then at the present time the sudden and massed employment of nuclear weapons can predetermine the outcome of an engagement literally within the first few hours.

The increased fire power of the means of destruction and the striving of the belligerents to achieve a preemptive strike have conditioned the scope of the meeting engagement. For example, reconnaissance against an advancing grouping may be conducted to a depth of up to 300 to 400 kilometers and carried out in a zone 150 to 200 kilometers wide. Missile/nuclear strikes may be

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delivered to a depth of up to 200 to 250 kilometers, and a tank army meeting engagement will develop immediately afterward on a front that is approximately 80 to 100 kilometers wide and sometimes even wider.

The classic form of conducting a meeting engagement, which involved the systematic, successive deployment of troops and their concentration in extremely narrow sectors of the front, is a thing of the past. This, for example, was the case near Prokhorovka, where the belligerents concentrated up to 1,500 tanks within a 12-kilometer strip. Under present conditions there will first be an exchange of strikes employing nuclear and chemical weapons, and then meeting battles will occur either successively or simultaneously on one or several axes to varying depths. The sum of these meeting battles will constitute the meeting engagement. Usually only one division (and less frequently two) will operate on each axis.

If the enemy actions are to be decisively preempted, the organization of the destruction of the enemy with strikes of nuclear and chemical weapons and with the fire of conventional means must be thorough and timely. Obviously, army rocket troops and artillery, army large units, fighter-bomber and bomber (long range) aviation, and the front rocket troops will participate in the attack. Since these means are subordinate to different commanders, the first task of the front and army commanders and their staffs is to organize the close cooperation of all these means in an effort to achieve the effective and timely destruction of the enemy.

In his decision and in the operational plan, the commander of the front specifies the possible strength of the enemy reserve groupings and the nature of their actions, the forces and means allocated to defeat the enemy, and sets the approximate time and areas for the delivery of attacks against him. Prior to the beginning of the meeting engagement, these questions are worked out in detail and transmitted to the tank army in advance. In most cases immediate destruction of the enemy is organized and carried out by the tank commander since he is better able to rationally exploit the nuclear means and combine their strikes with the actions of tank large units in support of an enemy defeat within a short time. In this case, the army commander determines the tasks for the army missile brigades, the

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supporting aviation, and other army means; he refines the targets and informs the front staff of them and the times and areas for delivery of strikes by those of his means that are participating in the rout of the reserve groupings; and he determines the methods for destroying the enemy.

The organization of the enemy's defeat can be carried out in conformity with the front commander's decision, while the army merely exploits the results of these strikes and organizes the destruction of the remaining enemy forces employing its own means, having taken into consideration the actions of the front means. This can happen when there is a meeting with a strong enemy grouping and when the army has only a limited quantity of nuclear weapons and means of delivery, reconnaissance (final reconnaissance), and control. However, in this case efforts must be allocated in a manner that precludes mutual interference when attacks are being delivered by the forces of various branch arms. This principle is of particularly great importance to the front (long range) aviation, which must accurately coordinate its strikes in terms of time with the operational-tactical and tactical missile strikes.

To ensure the safety of aviation operations when it is destroying the enemy jointly with the rocket troops it is essential that there be a strict allocation of targets for destruction to the rocket troops and aviation in the different areas and of the times for delivering strikes. Restricted zones where aviation flights are prohibited over siting areas of the rocket troops, and signals that prohibit the launching of missiles against targets located in the areas of aviation operations, must be established. Timely reporting on the radiation situation must be organized when the aviation is operating over areas where the rocket troops have delivered nuclear strikes, especially if ground bursts have been employed. The axes of the attacks of the tank large units must be accurately coordinated with the nuclear strikes, considering, in so doing, the possible aftereffects of the strikes (the formation of dangerous zones of contamination, centers of fires, etc.).

When routing enemy reserve groupings in a joint operation with a large airborne landing force, prior to the beginning of the engagement the army staff, on the basis of front instructions, will coordinate the delivery of nuclear and tank

50X1-HUM

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strikes with the actions of the airborne large units (units); establish communications with them; exchange information with them on the tasks and position of both sides; and designate the lines of contact for reconnaissance, the forward units, and the main forces. Depending on their position and status, the airborne troops will take aggressive action to divert part of the forces of the reserve grouping or employ an attack to the flank or rear to destroy missile/nuclear means, control posts, special weapons depots (posts), and airfields; i.e., they will actively participate in the defeat of the enemy.

A most important indicator of the success of a meeting engagement is the reliability of the destruction. For this reason the most important enemy groupings (nuclear attack means, tank and mechanized troops, control posts, surface-to-air missile systems, special weapons depots) should be destroyed by strikes employing nuclear and chemical weapons. For example, it is known that an enemy reserve grouping made up of three or four divisions and two or three Sergeant battalions will have an average of 150 targets of the Sergeant launching battery type, an Honest John battalion, a tank (motorized infantry) battalion, and their equivalent. To ensure reliable destruction of this grouping, it is necessary to destroy 30 to 40 percent of these targets. Fifty to 60 nuclear warheads may be required to destroy them (putting up to 50 to 70 percent of the manpower out of action). When the enemy has been damaged to this extent, the army large units will be able to complete their destruction and swiftly develop the offensive into the depth.

Depending on the situation, the strikes employing army and front means may be delivered simultaneously or successively as the enemy forces and means are identified. Against targets not destroyed by nuclear weapons, strikes may be delivered simultaneously with chemical-warhead missiles, as well as front aviation employing chemical and conventional warheads.

After completing the reconnaissance and final reconnaissance of the targets, the rocket troops (employing missiles of the R-300 type) will destroy the operational-tactical nuclear attack means, special weapons depots, air defense troops, aviation on the nearest airfields, and operational control posts, and also tank (motorized infantry) troops of the main grouping as they cross river lines, road junctions, defiles, and other areas

50X1-HUM

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(places) that restrict enemy maneuvering. The aviation will concentrate its efforts on the destruction of tactical nuclear means, tank (motorized infantry) groupings, and control posts. Separate missile battalions that have advanced into the engagement area under the cover of the forward detachments will destroy with their strikes important targets of the enemy first-echelon large units on the axis where one's own divisions are operating.

When a meeting engagement is initiated, the choice of the exact time for delivering nuclear strikes is of extreme importance, especially when enemy means of nuclear attack and tank units are to be destroyed. His Sergeant battalions, as is well known, will move forward behind security units 50 to 60 kilometers in advance of the main forces. Taking into consideration their minimum range of fire, they will occupy siting areas no closer than 50 kilometers to the probable line of deployment of the main forces, which at that time will be located at a distance of 100 kilometers or four or five hours away from it. The battalions will require about an hour to occupy prepared positions and to open fire. If the enemy is to be preempted, these means must be reconnoitered and destroyed before they occupy their positions and no later than four to five hours prior to the encounter with his main forces, which at that time will be located at a distance of up to 200 kilometers away.

It is desirable to attack the tank (motorized infantry) groupings when the main forces of the belligerents are separated by a distance of 40 to 50 kilometers. The army large units in this instance will be situated outside the kill zone of most of the enemy nuclear means (the Honest John free-flight rocket, the nuclear artillery), but at the same time, they will be capable of exploiting the results of the nuclear and chemical strikes in a timely manner so as to complete the destruction of the enemy. In so doing, depending on the anticipated results of the nuclear strike against the opposing enemy grouping, the operational situation, the status of the army, terrain conditions, and the radiation situation, such actions may be employed, for example, as an attack by our main forces upon the flank and the rear of the main enemy grouping, an attack by tank large units along separate axes for the purpose of splitting up the enemy grouping, or an attack against both flanks of the main enemy grouping.

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An attack against one of the enemy flanks usually is delivered when the army is occupying a favorable flank position in relation to the approaching enemy grouping. An attack against both flanks may take place when the army is moving out for a meeting engagement along a wide front and is capable of maneuvering its forces so that they come out upon the flanks of the approaching enemy grouping. If for some reason it does not appear possible to attack the enemy on one or both flanks, the maximum efforts of the first-echelon nuclear weapons and tank divisions must be concentrated against his main grouping and, exploiting the results of the employment of nuclear weapons and other means of destruction, frontal splitting attacks should be delivered.

The army grouping which is to conduct the meeting engagement will be formed during the advance toward the area where the meeting with the enemy will take place. It must conform to the commander's concept and it must provide for the delivery of a strong initial preemptive attack employing nuclear and chemical weapons and tank divisions. To accomplish this it is necessary in a timely manner to identify the main targets in the enemy grouping, to make the decision and transmit the tasks to the troops, to plan the fire destruction, and to provide all-round support of troop actions.

Experience shows that the simultaneous detection and identification of targets in the enemy grouping is very complex since the majority of the targets are mobile and continuously changing their location. To carry out this task will require the centralized utilization of army reconnaissance forces and means, concentrating their efforts in advance on identifying the most important enemy targets, and allocating substantial forces and means of the front air reconnaissance to carry out tasks in support of the army.

The reliability of cover for army troops against enemy air strikes, especially during the period when the rocket troops and tank divisions are being deployed, is achieved not only with their own means but also with reinforcement by front fighter aviation cover. As the experience of exercises shows, in addition to the one fighter air division, which is able to cover a tank army when it is operating separately, it must also be allocated a portion of the fighter aviation forces from other air

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50X1-HUM

divisions, which would be landed on the home airfields of the aviation in the area of combat actions of the front attack grouping.

The main efforts of the engineer troops will be focused on providing for the rapid deployment and advance of the troops, the construction of passages through obstacles and barriers, the laying of cross-country routes, the restoration of roads and bridges, the elimination of the aftereffects of enemy strikes, and in case the enemy attempts to break out on the flank or rear, the setting up of obstacles on the threatened axes.

During a meeting engagement the nature of army troop actions may vary. As has already been observed, the enemy will first be subjected to preemptive strikes by the rocket troops and supporting aviation, to the actions of the airborne landing forces and forward detachments, and then to the actions of tank large units.

Tactical airborne landing forces, in conformity with the commander's orders, by their own actions will destroy enemy nuclear attack means and control posts, and by joining with the forward detachments to seize road junctions and crossings on the routes of advance of the reserve grouping, will detain the enemy and compel him to deploy and enter the engagement under unfavorable conditions. The forward detachments, exploiting the strikes of the rocket troops and the supporting aviation, will swiftly penetrate into the depth, concentrating their efforts on seizing and destroying the surviving means of nuclear attack, control posts, and other important targets.

As the missile/nuclear strikes are delivered, the tank divisions will accelerate their advance into the area of combat actions. Subsequently, exploiting the results of the strikes, they will attack from the march in an effort to rout the main enemy forces in as short a time as possible and to develop their success into the depth without stopping.

If the meeting engagement occurs when enemy reserves are approaching from different directions simultaneously, the commander will decide which grouping it would be most advantageous to hit first, and without delay will concentrate strikes by nuclear and chemical weapons and aviation and attacks

50X1-HUM

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by tank large units against it. After routing the main enemy grouping he will direct the efforts of the army toward destroying the remaining forces (if the operation cannot develop any further without their destruction) or he will continue to carry out the task of delivering new attacks into the depth.

The flanking and penetrating enemy groupings that have broken through to the flank and rear of the army during the course of the engagement, as well as the landing forces that have been landed in the rear of our troops will be destroyed by units (subunits) allocated from the tank divisions of the first echelon and reserve (second echelon) of the army. Mobile obstacle detachments and special reserves will be employed against them. In so doing, the destruction of the groupings that have broken through into the rear should not divert the main forces of the army from the development of the offensive into the depth.

A tank army that is operating separately from the main forces of the front may encounter an enemy grouping of equal or even inferior strength. However, the situation following the exchange of nuclear and chemical strikes by the belligerents may develop unfavorably for the army. Under these conditions, (in addition to actions conducted by troops of the tank army itself) the effective assistance of front means will be needed, since they may be able to fundamentally alter the operational situation in favor of their attack grouping within the shortest amount of time.

A totally different situation may develop when the troops of the tank army are engaged in actions at a great depth during the final period of military actions in the theater of military operations. They may be characterized by the following: considerable losses of units and large units, suffered during preceding engagements; a limited number of combat means, especially of nuclear and chemical warheads; the need for an increase in the quantity of forces and means for reliable security and defense of the army missile brigade, the missile technical units, the rear, and control posts, caused by the presence of surviving enemy groupings (groups) in the rear and on its flanks; difficulty in transporting materiel reserves; and the possibility of a decrease in fighter aviation cover for the army troops.

50X1-HUM

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At this time it is difficult to foresee the entire complex and many-sided situation in which the army will have to carry out its tasks at the end of an offensive operation. All that can be stated with certainty is that at the time both sides will have suffered exceptionally great losses, and that the main reserves of their nuclear weapons, including operational-tactical weapons, will have been expended. Only one or two regiments (including composite regiments) and several individual composite subunits (detachments) in the form of reinforced battalions will be left in the majority of army large units. Individual large units may consist of only a composite regiment or a detachment. The situation of the enemy will be no less serious. Consequently, a meeting engagement on an army scale obviously will not be a typical feature of this period. At this time meeting battles (encounters) on a large unit and unit (subunit) scale will most likely take place.

Since their forces and means will be limited, the army troops obviously will avoid actions aimed at routing the enemy. Meeting battles most often may take the form of an initial encounter of the belligerents accompanied by swift maneuvering of the main forces to seize important areas (targets), and establish control over them until the front troops arrive.

* * *

In conclusion I would like to make several remarks pertaining to the defining of the limits (boundaries) and phases of the modern meeting engagement. Questions as to the make-up of the meeting engagement, its initiation and its conclusion, most often arise. For example, how are the army actions as a whole to be evaluated if decisive destruction is inflicted upon the enemy with nuclear and chemical weapons and the large units merely complete his defeat, and do so not in meeting battles but under conditions of a hasty going over to the defense? Is this to be defined as a meeting engagement?

In order to define correctly any type of combat action, particularly one conducted by a tank army, it is necessary first to identify the nature and objectives of the actions of the belligerents, both prior to the time the strikes are delivered and after the strikes, and the role of any given means of destruction and their influence on the conditions under which the

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50X1-HUM

engagement is prepared for and conducted.

As is known, nuclear weapons have the deciding role in the destruction of the enemy, including during a meeting engagement. The method of completing the defeat of the enemy that is chosen by tank (motorized rifle) large units depends on the degree to which he has been damaged. The method of action chosen is of only secondary importance in assessing the general nature of the army engagement. Here the main point is that when the belligerents are moving toward an encounter with each other, they will endeavor to achieve their objectives by delivering preemptive strikes with nuclear weapons and by having their ground forces large units launch a decisive offensive. Equally important is the fact that the preparation for the engagement will be carried out within very short time limits under conditions in which the belligerents are rapidly approaching each other and are being subjected to the effects of nuclear and chemical strikes. These are the most essential factors to be considered when defining the modern meeting engagement. To assert that a meeting engagement can take place only when it is conducted by the main ground forces of the belligerents is, in our opinion, nothing other than to disparage not only the role of nuclear weapons, but also the leadership skill of the commander in employing the main combat means, nuclear and chemical weapons, to destroy the enemy. For this reason a different understanding of both the beginning and the conclusion of the meeting engagement is now called for. The availability to the army of powerful, long-range combat means enable it, long before its forward and main forces encounter the enemy, to inflict decisive destruction upon him with powerful nuclear strikes and to complete his defeat even when employing only a portion of its forces.

In view of this it is desirable that the modern meeting engagement be treated as two interrelated phases of troop actions: the preemptive strike phase and the finishing actions phase.

The preemptive strike phase involves carrying out a series of operational measures directed toward the effective destruction of a specific enemy grouping by means of powerful nuclear and chemical strikes, and establishing an advantageous grouping of tank army troops before the enemy is able to deliver his nuclear

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strike. The main objective of delivering a preemptive nuclear strike is to drastically weaken the nuclear and ground groupings of the enemy.

To achieve this it is necessary in every engagement to build up reconnaissance efforts in a timely manner and identify the most important targets in the enemy grouping; to make a decision and transmit tasks to the troops quickly; to maintain the rocket troops, artillery, and supporting aviation at a high level of combat readiness; and to carry out timely strikes calculated to destroy the enemy, first and foremost his nuclear means. To this end it is essential to send forward in a timely manner subunits and units for radiotechnical reconnaissance and jamming, and to deploy them in the meeting engagement area under cover of the forward detachments (advance guards); to analyze and assess the status and capabilities of the means of both sides for delivering nuclear strikes; to designate the primary enemy targets, the destruction of which would considerably lower enemy nuclear weapons capabilities; to provide the troops with missiles and other ammunition; to move the missile battalions of the large units, and when necessary, the foward control posts as well, into the area where it is assumed the meeting with the enemy will take place.

In addition, actions carried out by the airborne landing forces and forward detachments and the rapid advance of the main forces must establish favorable conditions for preempting the enemy in the deployment of tank groupings and their delivery of attacks. In general, during this phase (period) it is essential to endeavor to achieve nuclear superiority over the enemy in the shortest possible time and to inflict decisive destruction on his main missile, aviation, and ground forces groupings, thus achieving the main objectives of the engagement prior to the time the tank large units are committed to it.

The finishing actions phase is characterized by actions of tank army troops aimed at completing the defeat of the enemy. Accordingly, on one axis the actions of tank large units may be connected with completing the defeat of the enemy at the moment he is bringing his troops into a combat-effective state, on another axis the army's troops will have to take part in a meeting encounter with enemy units and large units that have retained their combat effectiveness, and on a third axis they

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will have to attack the enemy who is hastily going over to the defense, and rout his counterattacking forces.

In our opinion, consideration of the questions of the meeting engagement on this plane makes it possible to set forth the nature of the modern meeting engagement with sufficient thoroughness and to purposefully orient the preparation of troops and staffs toward the conduct of such combat actions in the operations of a nuclear war.

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